

DEM-DEC Global Research Update – July 2019

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Twelfth Global Research Update since DEM-DEC was launched

This twelfth monthly update was issued on 26 July 2019 and is [now available on DEM-DEC](#). Sincere thanks to [DEM-DEC Research Editors Kuan-Wei Chen](#) and Anant Sangal, who assisted in production of this Update.

Additions in the July Update include:

- New research worldwide from June-late July 2019
- A significant list of additions suggested by DEM-DEC Users
- A growing list of forthcoming research, and
- Resources recently added to the DEM-DEC [Links](#) section

Identifying Themes

In each monthly I select key themes. The aim is simply to provide ‘added value’ by helping users to navigate the Update, and to provide some limited commentary, especially on very recent research. Although it is impossible to capture every dimension of the issues covered in this Update, six key themes can be picked out.

1 Remembering Agnes Heller

On 19 July the Hungarian philosopher Agnes Heller passed away at the age of 90. A survivor of the Holocaust, Heller and her husband moved to Australia in 1977 to escape political persecution, returning after the collapse of Communism in 1989. In recent years, Heller was a vocal critic of the dismantling of liberal democracy in her home country. Her article [‘Hungary: How Liberty Can Be Lost’](#), published in Spring 2019, rewards a close read. As Heller put it:

A story is always a story of choices. It was not written in the stars that Hungary would fare worst among all post-Soviet states or that it would be the most radical in its elimination of freedom of the press or balance of power in government and wind up with a system I call tyranny. Tyranny is not a form of state (like democracy or fascism or communism) but a type of rule, where a single person (generally male) decides everything that happens in a country and nothing can happen against this single person’s will. (...)

Although it was not written in the stars that this would happen, the possibility of relapse into a kind to tyranny was nevertheless there from the beginning. How did it happen and why?

An [abridged version of the article](#) was published by the Public Seminar website in Heller's memory. A useful companion piece is [David Andersen's review essay](#) (of three key books on democratisation and democratic backsliding) in *Comparative Politics* (July 2019), in which he proposes a framework for a more comprehensive understanding of the most well-known backsliding experiences in the United States, Venezuela, Hungary, and Turkey.

2 Forthcoming Books on the Far Right

Heller's escape from Hungary to Australia in the 1970s reflected the Cold War geopolitical division of the globe into the NATO-aligned democratic 'First World', Communist 'Second World', and unaligned 'Third World'. We now inhabit a world where the poles of full liberal democracy and hard authoritarianism (never themselves fully reflective of reality) are giving way to a growing 'grey zone' of states that lie somewhere between these poles. While governmental threats to extant liberal democracy are often discussed under the rubric of populism, or authoritarian populism, many scholars focus on the notion of the 'far right', which is a broader and more prevalent phenomenon. A range of forthcoming books are of note. [Cas Mudde's *The Far Right Today*](#) (due out in November) promises to be a landmark work. Two further books focus on the far right in the [UK](#) and [Australia](#). A useful companion read is Mark Sedgwick's recent book on [16 key thinkers of the radical right](#), suggested for addition by a DEM-DEC user. Take a look too at [DEM-DEC's Anniversary Research Compilation](#) for more research on the far right in Europe, Brazil, and the USA; and at research resources on the far right in the DEM-DEC [Links](#) section. That said, the [recent UN report on human rights in Venezuela](#) (5 July 2019) underlines that not all enemies of liberal democracy hail from the right side of the political spectrum.

3 Cities and Democratic Decay

Categorising any state as lying within one monolithic category (liberal democratic, authoritarian, or otherwise) is further complicated by the sometimes-stark disparities between cities and surrounding populations, which can dictate who wins power. [Jonathan Rodden's new book, *Why Cities Lose: The Deep Roots of the Urban-Rural Political Divide*](#) (June 2019) investigates the historical roots of the urban-rural divide in the US, revealing the extent to which the urban vote is increasingly diminished by a variety of structures that magnify the rural vote and prevent even clear electoral majorities translating into political power. In Hungary today, as [Theresa Gessler and Anna Kyriazi discuss in a new book chapter](#), we see a clear urban-rural divide in support for the Fidesz government. In Turkey, the ruling AKP's loss in the recently [re-run Istanbul elections](#) have punctured President Erdoğan's aura of invincibility. While extreme divides in urban-rural political preferences are far from a universal phenomenon, this area requires greater attention, especially from a comparative perspective.

4 Optimism on Investigative Journalism

As well as investigating new frontiers in this area, we see scholars casting their eyes on core features of the democratic state to address contemporary

assumptions about their operation and health. In this vein, [Andrea Carson's new book *Investigative Journalism, Democracy and the Digital Age*](#) (July 2019) focuses on the role such journalism plays as a check on power, tracing its development into the digital age. Drawing on a wealth of empirical evidence, Carson makes the unexpected argument that, despite multiple disruptions to the profession and its business model, fears that investigative journalism is in decline in developed economies is not supported by the evidence.

5 Are We at a Hinge in History?

[Larry Diamond's new book is finally out](#), with the title clearly staking out his approach: *Ill Winds: Saving Democracy from Russian Rage, Chinese Ambition, and American Complacency*. Diamond discusses the deterioration of Western democracies and the decline of the West's 'soft power' alongside the rise of 'sharp power' employed by authoritarian states such as Russia and China. Although many global readers may chafe at his apparent call for a return to the US's role as the "indispensable nation", Diamond's note of hope will resonate widely, suggesting that we are suspended between the end of one era and the beginning of the next:

We are at a hinge in history, between a new era of tyranny and a new age of democratic renewal. Free governments can defend their values; free citizens can exercise their rights. We can make the internet safe for liberal democracy, exploit the soft, kleptocratic underbelly of dictatorships, and revive America's degraded democracy. *Ill Winds* offers concrete, deeply informed suggestions to fight polarization, reduce the influence of money in politics, and make every vote count.

In 2019, freedom's last line of defense still remains "We the people."

6 Imagining a Future Beyond Liberal Democracy

Diamond's analysis speaks to the idea that liberal democracy is not merely one choice among many forms of government, but the *only* legitimate form of government – a topic addressed at length by two pieces in this Update, both suggested for addition by DEM-DEC users: Alessandro Ferrara's book from 2014, [The Democratic Horizon](#); and [Christian Pippan's 2012 book chapter](#) on whether democracy had emerged as a global norm. That moment of seemingly growing global liberal democratic hegemony has passed, and whereas Diamond might be understood as preoccupied more with the restoration or revival of liberal democracy worldwide, others have turned their minds to the possibilities of new thinking, models and forms of democratic practice. Ferrara urges the need for liberal democrats to emphasise the spirit of democracy and embrace an imaginative openness in conceiving of multiple versions of democratic culture rooted in diverse civilizational contexts.

More recently, in the journal [Jurisprudence: An International Journal of Legal and Political Thought](#) (July 2019) Eugénie Mérieau provides an excellent review of Michael Dowdle and Michael Wilkinson's 2017 edited collection, *Beyond Liberal Constitutionalism*, observing that, while a highly valuable exercise, the

collection's attempt to conceive of constitutionalism *beyond* liberalism (as opposed to *against* it) itself meets serious worldview and epistemic limitations. Finally, in his paper for the workshop 'Alternatives to Liberal Constitutionalism: Popular, Political, Deliberative' at the IVR (Law & Philosophy) World Congress in July 2019, Akritas Kaidatzis discusses '[populist](#)', '[popular](#)' and '[political](#)' constitutionalism as purported alternatives that have failed to replace the dominant model of liberal constitutionalism but which can enrich our understanding of democratic constitutionalism.

(For more discussion of conceptual issues, see the [Concept Index](#) on DEM-DEC).

The DEM-DEC Bibliography

The [DEM-DEC Main Bibliography](#) (finalised on 24 June 2018) presents a global range of research on democratic decay. It has a strong focus on research by public lawyers – spanning constitutional, international and transnational law – but also includes key research from other disciplines, as well as policy texts. Updates to the Bibliography are issued during the first week of every month, based on new publications and suggestions from users of DEM-DEC. All updates should be read in conjunction with the main bibliography on DEM-DEC.

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DEM-DEC Launch Podcast

Have you listened to the DEM-DEC Launch Podcast yet? The panel discussion to formally launch DEM-DEC on 22 October was broadcast by ABC Radio National's 'Big ideas' programme on 27 and 28 November and is [now available as a podcast](#). The [launch programme and details](#) are on DEM-DEC.

